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Department
for Education

Music

GCSE subject content

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The content for music GCSEs

Introduction

1. GCSE subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject. Together with the assessment objectives it provides the framework within which the awarding organisations create the detail of their specifications, so ensuring progression from key stage 3 national curriculum requirements and the possibilities for development into A level.

2. GCSE music specifications must support students in forming personal and meaningful relationships with music through the development of musical knowledge, understanding and skills. They must encourage students to engage critically and creatively with a wide range of music and musical contexts, develop an understanding of the place of music in different cultures and contexts and reflect on how music is used in the expression of personal and collective identities. GCSE music specifications must also support the development of musical fluency and provide access to further study of music at AS and A level.

Subject aims and learning outcomes

3. GCSE specifications in music must offer a broad and coherent course of study which encourages students to:

- engage actively in the study of music
- develop skills to perform music individually and in groups and demonstrate some fluency and control of the resources used
- develop skills to organise musical ideas and make use of appropriate resources
- recognise links between the integrated activities of performing, composing and appraising underpinned by attentive listening
- broaden experience and interests, develop imagination and foster creativity
- develop knowledge, understanding and skills needed to communicate effectively as musicians
- develop awareness of a variety of instruments, styles and approaches to performing and composing
- develop awareness of music technologies and their use in the creation and presentation of music
- recognise contrasting genres, styles and traditions of music, and develop some awareness of musical chronology

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- develop as effective and independent learners with enquiring minds
- reflect upon and evaluate their own and others' music
- engage with and appreciate the diverse heritage of music, in order to promote personal, social, intellectual and cultural development

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4. GCSE specifications in music must require students to develop and demonstrate their musicianship skills through performing, composing and appraising.

5. GCSE specifications in music must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the musical elements, musical contexts and musical language listed below, and allow students, where appropriate, to apply these to their own work in performance and composition.

Musical elements

- organisation of pitch (melodically and harmonically) including scale, triad, arpeggio and perfect and imperfect cadences
- tonality including major, minor and pentatonic
- structure including binary, call and response, ternary, verse and chorus, rondo, theme & variations and ground bass
- sonority including identification of standard orchestral timbres and standard vocal groupings
- tempo, metre and rhythm including pulse, simple time, compound time, triplets, dotted rhythms and common Italian terms, e.g. allegro, andante
- texture including unison, chordal and solo
- dynamics including accents, loud and quiet and basic Italian terms e.g. piano, forte

Musical contexts

- composer, performer and audience including amateur and professional, commissioning, soloist, domestic and public audience
- occasion, time and place including sacred and secular, private or public and venue e.g. concert hall, stadium

Musical language

- reading and writing of staff notation including treble-clef and bass-clef note names, simple note values, key signatures to four sharps and four flats
- chord symbols including major chords and minor chords

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- accurate use of musical vocabulary including recognition and use of appropriate terminology e.g. slide, repeats and stepwise

6. GCSE specifications in music must require students to demonstrate the ability to:

Perform

- make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to interpret musical ideas with technical control, expression and interpretation. This must be achieved by one or more of the following means: playing or singing music, improvising, or realising music using music technology
- perform music with control, making expressive use of phrase and dynamics appropriate to the style and mood of the music

Compose

- make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to create and develop musical ideas with technical control and coherence; freely as the composer chooses, and responding to a brief or commission supplied by others. This must be achieved by one or more of the following means: experimenting, developing, critical refinement and being influenced by other composers' work
- compose music that shows an ability to develop musical ideas and use conventions, and explore the potential of musical structures and resources

Appraise

- reflect upon, analyse and evaluate music in aural and/or written form, using knowledge and understanding of musical elements, techniques and resources to make critical judgements about repertoire and context of music within the areas of study.
- make critical judgements about their own and others' music, using a musical vocabulary
- formulation of critical judgements will be achieved by attentive listening (rather than just hearing) and aural perception

7. GCSE specifications in music must require students to apply the knowledge and understanding in paragraph 3 as appropriate through the skills of:

- performing
- composing
- appraising

Areas of study

8. Areas of study must provide an appropriate focus for students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills. They must encompass repertoire that allows the musical elements, musical contexts and musical language to be taught in context and allow opportunities for students to demonstrate contextual understanding through their performance and composition.
9. An area of study might be, for example, a genre, style, musical device, idiom, musical process, period of time, cultural tradition or contextual influence
10. GCSE music specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills from paragraph 5 through four areas of study.
 - at least one area of study must be drawn from music composed in the western classical tradition between 1700 and 1900
 - at least one other area of study must be drawn from a contrasting area of music (this could be from the western classical tradition outside of 1700 – 1900, or from a different tradition within the years of 1700 – 1900, or from a different tradition and time period)
11. GCSE music specifications must offer a minimum choice of 4 areas of study and require students to place music studied within a wider context and chronology.

Assessment

12. Within the performing assessment:
 - the total performance across all pieces must be no less than 4 minutes
 - students must perform at least two pieces
 - one piece must be as part of an ensemble and must be a minimum of 1 minute
 - a student performing as part of an ensemble must perform a significant individual part, which is not doubled, as a member of an ensemble, accompanied or unaccompanied. The ensemble must consist of two or more players. The student's part may be realised acoustically or by the use of music technology appropriate to the context. (A solo with accompaniment is not acceptable unless the student being assessed is the accompanist)
13. Within the composing assessment:
 - total composition duration across all pieces must be no less than 3 minutes
 - students must compose at least two pieces
 - one piece must respond to an awarding organisation set brief
 - one piece must allow students to devise their own composition without a set brief



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